

## **TEACHERS' STRATEGIES TO GAIN STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION AT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to identify and analyse the strategies employed by teachers in teaching reading comprehension to eighth-grade students at SMPN 7 Palu and to examine how these strategies are implemented. This study employs a qualitative approach, utilising observation and interviews as data collection methods. The subjects of this study are teachers and eighth-grade students at SMPN 7 Palu. The findings indicate that the primary strategy employed by teachers is the use of question-answer relationships (QARs). The implementation of QARs involves guiding students to understand the text through questions, encouraging them to answer in their own words, and improving their focus and concentration in interpreting the text. Additionally, teachers encourage students to identify and ask about words they do not understand, thereby enriching their vocabulary. The results of this study indicate that the QAR strategy is effective in improving students' reading comprehension by facilitating active engagement and critical thinking toward the text content.

Keywords: Teacher strategy, reading Comprehension, Junior High School.

### **BACKGROUND**

English is a vital international language that connects people with the world in various aspects, including education (Alvionita et al., 2022). At the junior high school and senior high school levels, it is highly required to learn English as a guide in the future career. It highlights the importance of mastering foreign languages, especially English, as a key to success in one's academic field and to support careers in the workforce (Gautam, 2022).

Reading comprehension is a way for students to master the ideas contained in reading texts, including the meaning of the text, the pronunciation of words, and the overall understanding of the text. Understanding the comprehension process is crucial to the study of the reading (Setiawati & Budiasih, 2022).

The best foundation for learning languages, especially for English students, includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It applies to the English processes of reading and listening as receptive skills while speaking and writing are considered productive skills. Often, people can only master speaking; in truth, written language is also important to master. For example, there is a task to access the internet and one is asked to reply to an email; of course, s(he) need careful reading skills and the ability to write using the correct language and give appropriate answers. Therefore, reading ability is considered an essential skill to master for anyone to be successful in the modern era (Ekowijayanto et al., 2021).

Based on informal interviews with English teachers and students of SMPN 7 Palu, a state junior high school, the

researcher found that students have difficulty with comprehension. More students lack vocabulary, so they find it difficult to find the meaning of words and recipient words. They also face difficulties in understanding the text's content. Students are also unable to understand reading because they do not know how to play this technique in reading skills such as skimming and scanning.

To make the students better readers, teachers need to pay attention to how they read and what they can do to improve their understanding of reading a text, and one of them is to have a strategy for reading comprehension.

This research is significant as it focuses on teachers' strategies for reading comprehension among eighth-grade students at SMPN 7 Palu, employing a qualitative research approach. The techniques used for collecting data included observation and interviews. This study aims to provide valuable insights into effective teaching strategies for reading comprehension.

Therefore, the researchers aim to identify the strategies employed by English teachers so that students can directly understand the content and purpose of the text, thereby enhancing their reading comprehension. This study provides practical guidance for teachers in improving their students' reading comprehension. Based on the description above, the researcher intends to conduct a study entitled "Teachers' Strategies to gain studentss reading Comprehension at Junior High School."

Based on the background of the research above, the researcher formulated the questions and objectives of this study. The first research question aims to explore the specific strategies used by English teachers in teaching reading comprehension to the Eighth-grade students of SMPN 7 Palu. The second research question delves into the practical application of these strategies in the

classroom, providing a comprehensive understanding of their effectiveness.

### **Reading Comprehension**

Reading is essential for learners both inside and outside of the classroom because it promotes academic success and career prospects (Setiawati & Budiasih, 2022). In reading, comprehension is the ultimate goal and teachers serve as guides in this process (Duke et al., 2011). Teachers can employ various tactics to teach reading comprehension, including using real materials and techniques, reading aloud in class, asking comprehension questions, and evaluating the text's difficulty level (Dwiningtias et al., 2020). Teachers play a crucial role in helping students develop strong reading comprehension abilities. When educators notice that pupils are having trouble understanding what they are reading, it becomes essential for them to create and put into place specific strategies to improve comprehension (Richardson, 2010).

#### *Level of Reading Comprehension*

Reading Comprehension into three levels, beginning with literal comprehension, which constitutes the fundamental skill of extracting explicitly stated information directly from the text, forming the bedrock upon which deeper understanding is built (Shea & Ceprano, 2017). Next, inferential comprehension requires readers to go beyond the surface level of the text, drawing conclusions and making inferences based on implicit cues and contextual clues embedded within the narrative, thus demanding a more nuanced engagement with the material.

The last, Evaluative comprehension signifies the highest echelon of cognitive interaction with textual material, challenging readers to undertake a rigorous assessment encompassing the substance, intent, and foundational presuppositions of the text, thereby fostering an intricately refined grasp of the author's communication and its

broader ramifications (Roomy, 2022). It is important for students to have a strategic reading ability that enables them to learn independently from texts; however, research has not made it clear how to do this most effectively (Elleman & Oslund, 2019).

#### *Component of Reading Comprehension*

The components of reading comprehension encompass a multifaceted array of cognitive and linguistic processes that synergistically converge to enable individuals to derive meaning from written text. These components include word recognition, which entails the accurate and automatic identification of individual words within the text, serving as the foundational building block for subsequent comprehension processes (Sulaiman et al., 2021).

Next is vocabulary knowledge, which encompasses the breadth and depth of an individual's understanding of words and their meanings, plays a pivotal role in deciphering the intended message conveyed by the author (Kamarudin et al., 2019). And then, sentence comprehension, which involves the ability to parse and interpret the grammatical structure and semantic relationships within sentences, enabling readers to extract meaning from individual statements.

Text comprehension signifies the overarching ability to integrate information from multiple sentences and paragraphs to construct a coherent and meaningful representation of the entire text, requiring readers to synthesize ideas, identify main themes, and draw inferences to achieve a holistic understanding (Landi et al., 2013). Prior knowledge, which refers to the existing knowledge and experiences that readers bring to the reading process, serves as a crucial framework for interpreting new information and making connections between the text and their own understanding of the world (McShane, 2013). Active mental processing is

necessary to gain the knowledge required for reading comprehension (Efriza et al., 2023).

#### *Strategies for Improving Reading Comprehension*

To maximize educational goals, students need to become proficient in reading comprehension, enabling them to successfully manage their academic workload (Setiawati & Budiasih, 2022). Reading comprehension is an active process that requires readers to interact and engage with a text (Ford & Otto, 1967). To support students' comprehension development, teachers can employ strategies such as scaffolding, think-alouds, and reciprocal teaching (Setiawati & Budiasih, 2022).

Close reading, which encourages students to carefully analyze and interpret complex texts, can also enhance comprehension skills (Dakin, 2013). Furthermore, encouraging students to connect the text with their own experiences or prior knowledge can deepen their understanding and engagement (Musdalifah, 2021). An early and sustained focus on developing background knowledge, vocabulary, inference, and comprehension monitoring skills across development is necessary to improve comprehension (Elleman & Oslund, 2019).

#### *Types of Strategies in Teaching Reading Comprehension*

Effective reading comprehension involves a multifaceted process that encompasses decoding printed symbols, extracting meaning from text, possessing sufficient vocabulary, understanding sentence construction, and integrating information with prior knowledge (Valizadeh, 2021). Teachers should teach a range of reading strategies such as pre-reading activities like surveying the text and identifying the purpose for reading (Musdalifah, 2021). During reading, strategies such as highlighting key information, annotating the text, and asking

questions can aid comprehension (Swan et al., 2018). Post-reading activities like summarizing, retelling, and reflecting on the text can reinforce understanding and retention. It is imperative for educators to understand how a student interacts with text so that he/she can figure out which strategy instruction will be most beneficial (Richardson, 2010). For instance, students' comprehension can be supported through instruction in comprehension monitoring, question answering, summarization, and the use of graphic organizers (Droop et al., 2015). Teachers can also help their students learn how to monitor their comprehension by explicitly teaching them how to recognize when they don't understand something and what to do about it (Yang, 2006). One instructional strategy that has stood out as nearly universal through the elementary years, sometimes continuing into middle school: comprehension (Peters, 2012).

Teachers play an important role in helping students improve reading comprehension, such as posing questions that encourage active participation and expressing opinions about the text (Salmerón et al., 2022). Vacca (1999) explains several strategies to gain reading comprehension, including monitoring comprehension, recognizing story structure, question and answer relationships, using mental imagery, summarizing, and using anticipation guides (Poch & Lembke, 2018).

Monitoring comprehension is one of the most important strategies in that readers need to be aware of their understanding of the material they are reading. In this strategy, teachers have to make sure that their students stop periodically to check if the text is making sense (Dwiningtiyas et al., 2020). If students do not understand, they should then go back and reread the portion of the text they are struggling with, look for context clues, and ask questions.

Recognizing story structure requires students to be aware of the components that make up a story, such as the characters,

setting, problem, and solution.(Musdalifah, 2021) When students know these components, they can use them as a framework for understanding and remembering what they read. By explicitly teaching story structure, teachers provide students with a valuable tool for organizing information and enhancing comprehension.

Question and answer relationships are a strategy that helps students understand that the answers to questions about a text can be found in different places(Susanto, 2020). Some answers are explicitly stated in the text, while others require students to infer or draw conclusions based on what they have read. This approach not only enhances comprehension but also equips students with critical thinking skills, enabling them to engage more deeply with the material and form their own interpretations(Butler et al., 2021).

## **METHOD OF THE RESEARCH**

The researcher employed a descriptive qualitative design in this study because it focused on a specific teacher and their teaching strategies related to the activities of teaching and learning English. This research does not require treatment of the object of research. Researchers observe, looking for information and phenomena as they are without manipulation; therefore, a descriptive qualitative design was appropriate. The design consisted of two stages: first, observation of the teachers and students to research the conditions and teaching and learning process; and second, interviews with English teachers after the observation.

The researcher records the observation results and organizes the data as a temporary conclusion. Classroom observations provide a direct view of the teaching process, while interviews with the teacher can give reasons for the strategies they used (Hidayati et al., 2021). Observations were made in the classroom during teaching and learning to see the activities directly, focusing on the

strategies used by the teacher in teaching reading comprehension.

To gain nuanced insights into the pedagogical approaches, beliefs, and practical techniques employed by English teachers in fostering reading comprehension, semi-structured interviews were implemented (Arwila, 2022). During interview process, the researcher inquired about the teacher's classroom learning process using the mentioned strategy. The researcher aims to analyze the outcomes of this strategy, with the expectation of enhancing students' reading comprehension, particularly among eighth-grade students at SMPN 7 Palu. The teacher's perspective is also crucial, as their insights offer invaluable understanding of the strategy's effectiveness and potential areas for refinement (Iskandar & Lusiana, 2019; Tiarazani et al., 2020).

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the research. The research findings include an analysis of the strategies used by teachers in teaching the reading comprehension process.

The QARs (Question Answer Relationship) strategy is used by the teacher of eighth-grade students at SMPN 7 Palu, utilising this strategy through understanding and questions. This strategy guides students to understanding and questions. This strategy guides students only to read one question given by the teacher. Students only read once; to understand further, they focus on the questions given by the teacher.

This strategy can help students if they answer the questions in their own words. The teacher must help students become aware so that students answer well. With this strategy, the teacher can determine to what extent students understand the material presented to them and also gain a deeper understanding of the text content used by the teachers in reading comprehension because,

during the learning process, students must focus on the text using the QARs strategy, prepare answers to questions that will be given and know the meaning of the answer.

### *Findings of Observation*

During the investigation, the researcher meticulously documented all activities conducted by the teachers. The observation revealed that the teacher initiated the class with greetings and inquiries about the students' well-being, while also reviewing the previous lesson. Subsequently, a student was selected to lead a prayer, fostering a religious atmosphere. The teacher's preliminary actions included extending polite greetings with a smile to students as they entered the classroom, accompanied by the salutation "Assalamu'alaikum." The students collectively recited a prayer before commencing their studies. Before proceeding with new material, the teacher recapped the previously studied content. Following this review, the teacher transitioned into the core activity by introducing the reading material for the day, which focused on describing people, animals, and objects.

The researcher also observed the activity in the classroom where the teacher implemented a specific strategy to aid reading comprehension. During the observation, students encountered unfamiliar words and proactively sought clarification from the teacher, demonstrating their engagement with the material and the teacher's role in facilitating understanding.

### *Findings of Interview*

The researcher conducted interviews with two key informants, eighth-grade teachers at SMPN 7 Palu, to gather data. To ensure comprehensive data collection, direct observation and additional interviews were employed to supplement information not revealed in the initial interviews. The data collection focused on the research objectives, encompassing prepared

questions and answers related to the strategies, as well as the researcher's role in their implementation. The research involved observing the strategies used by the teachers during the teaching and learning process with eighth-grade students at SMPN 7 Palu. This multifaceted approach aimed to provide a thorough understanding of the strategies' impact on student reading comprehension.

## **Discussion**

This study aims to identify and analyse the strategies employed by teachers in teaching reading comprehension to eighth-grade students at SMPN 7 Palu, as well as to examine the implementation of these strategies. Based on observation and interview data, it was found that the Question Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy was the primary strategy used by teachers.

Findings indicate that the QAR strategy was implemented by guiding students to understand the text through questions. Teachers ask questions that encourage students not only to skim-read but also to delve deeper into the meaning of the text. This can be seen from the description that students only read once but focus on the questions given by the teacher for further understanding. This is the essence of QARs, where students are trained to recognise the types of questions (e.g., In the Text or My Head) that help them find the answers (Baqi, 2019). This approach allows educators to actively engage students, stimulate critical thinking, and foster a deeper comprehension of textual content (Ishak & Nahdhiyah, 2020).

The importance of this strategy is emphasised in the student's ability to answer questions in their own words. It implies that QARs not only train students to find literal answers but also to process information and restate it. This ability is crucial for deep reading comprehension, as students do not simply copy information but rather understand and internalise it (Solihin & Muaz, 2022). Teachers play a vital role in

helping students understand the importance of providing accurate answers, which ultimately enables teachers to assess the extent of students' understanding of the material and the content of the text.

Research shows that through QARs, teachers can determine the extent to which students understand a text (Baqi, 2019; Knight, 2017; Solihin & Muaz, 2022). If students can answer and ask questions themselves, this is a strong indicator that they have a comprehensive understanding of the text's content. The example given, where the teacher asked the meaning of words and only a few students knew the meaning of 'fence,' shows how this strategy can reveal areas of understanding that need improvement.

Classroom observations showed that teachers encouraged students to mark words they did not understand and then ask the teacher about them. This is an excellent practice in reading instruction because it helps students overcome vocabulary barriers that often hinder comprehension. The habit of recording the meanings of words in the book as 'little notes' also indicates an effort to enrich students' vocabulary, which is an important foundation for reading comprehension.

Although the primary focus was on QAR strategies, observations also provided context on how teachers began their lessons. Opening activities, such as greeting students, inquiring about their well-being, reviewing previous lessons, and praying, demonstrated efforts to create a conducive learning environment and instil religious values and good manners. These are essential prerequisites before proceeding to the core of reading comprehension instruction.

The implementation of QARs in grade VIII at SMPN 7 Palu was effective in several aspects:

- ✓ Increased Student Focus: This strategy guided students to focus more on the reading text. With questions to answer, students automatically searched for key information and details in the text,

reducing the tendency to read aimlessly (butar et al., 2022).

- ✓ Increased Concentration in Interpreting Texts: Teachers can help students concentrate on interpreting the reading text. This means that students not only read but also analyse and interpret the information, which represents a higher level of comprehension (Block, 2022).
- ✓ Increased Student Confidence: By practising answering questions through QARs, students feel more capable of understanding the content of the reading. This sense of capability can increase students' confidence in facing new texts in the future (Solihin & Muaz, 2022).

Although this study provides a good overview of the use of QARs, several areas could be explored further. For example, the study does not specify how teachers differentiated between types of QAR questions (e.g., Right There, Think and Search, Author and Me, On My Own) and whether students were taught to identify these types of questions. Additionally, there is a lack of quantitative data on improvements in students' reading comprehension following the implementation of QARs, which could be an area for future research. Overall, this study demonstrates that QARs are a practical approach to helping students improve their reading comprehension at SMPN 7 Palu, with a focus on active student engagement in processing textual information.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

### Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, the researcher concludes that teachers at SMPN 7 Palu effectively use the Question Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy in teaching reading comprehension to eighth-grade students. This strategy is implemented by focusing students on understanding the text through a series of questions that

encourage students not only to read but also to interpret and construct answers in their own words.

The application of QARs has been proven to help students to (1) Improve focus and concentration on the content of the reading text, (2) Develop the ability to interpret texts in depth, (3) Enrich vocabulary through the identification and discussion of difficult words; (4) Increase confidence in understanding and answering questions related to the text.

Through the QAR strategy, teachers can monitor how well students understand the material and the content of the reading. Students' ability to answer and even create their questions serves as a strong indicator of comprehensive understanding. Therefore, this study confirms that QARs are a valuable strategy for improving students' reading comprehension skills at the junior high school level.

### Suggestion

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study on the use of Question Answer Relationship (QAR) strategies by teachers in teaching reading comprehension at SMPN 7 Palu, several suggestions can be made to relevant parties:

First, English Teachers can continue and Develop the Implementation of QARs: Teachers are advised to continue using and even develop variations of the QARs strategy. Although this study demonstrates the effectiveness of QARs, teachers can further explore how to integrate various types of QAR questions (such as Right There, Think and Search, Author and Me, and On My Own) more explicitly so that students understand the differences and how to answer each type of question.

Second, for Further Research, it is recommended to conduct further research using a quantitative approach to statistically measure the impact of using QARs on improving students' reading comprehension scores. Further researchers can also compare classes that use QARs with classes that use

other strategies, allowing for a clearer understanding of the differences in effectiveness.

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