Enhancing Students' Reading Comprehension In Descriptive Text Through Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA): A Classroom Action Research At The Tenth Grade Of SMA Negeri 6 Padangsidimpuan

Mutiara Cindy Tesalonika Hutapea[1*]

[1]Bachelor of English Language Education, Universitas Graha Nusantara, Indonesia

Yuswin Harputra [2]

[2]English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Graha Nusantara, Indonesia

Tinur Rahmawati Harahap[3]

[3]English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Graha Nusantara, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the effectiveness of Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) in enhancing reading comprehension of descriptive texts among tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 6 Padangsidimpuan. Using classroom action research with 32 students from Class X-1, the study implemented DRTA through a systematic approach of prediction, verification, and reflection. Initial assessment showed only 15.625% of students achieving scores above the Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM) of 75. Findings demonstrate significant improvement, with average scores increasing from 56.56 in pre-cycle to 71.91 in Cycle I and 83.34 in Cycle II. The percentage of students reaching KKM rose to 90.625% after Cycle II. DRTA effectively transformed reading into an interactive process, addressing key challenges of vocabulary deficiencies and low engagement. The findings highlight the importance of student-centered approaches in EFL reading instruction.

Corresponding Author:
Mutiara Cindy Tesalonika Hutapear
English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Graha Nusantara, Indonesia
Email: mutiaracnd29@gmail.com

A. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a foundational skill in educational settings, crucial for academic achievement and lifelong learning. As English continues to solidify its position

as an international language, the ability to read and comprehend English texts has become increasingly important for students worldwide. Reading in English not only facilitates access to vast amounts of information but also enhances overall language proficiency by improving vocabulary, writing, speaking, and listening skills through engagement with diverse textual materials that help students think in English (But et al., 2017; Kasper, 2000).

Reading is fundamentally an interpretive act within written communication, where the reader actively engages with and responds to the text (Wallace, 2014). This involves a dynamic interaction between the writer, who communicates ideas through text, and the reader, who interprets these ideas to understand the author's intended message. Bond and Wagner describe reading as a communicative process through which the reader attempts to align with the author's perspective, ideas, and experiences, extracting meaning from the text based on their relevant concepts and understandings. Therefore, reading comprehension is highly personalized and interpretive, dependent on the reader's ability to bring their knowledge to the reading process.

In Indonesia, the curriculum prioritizes reading skills as essential for developing communicative competence in English. The curriculum emphasizes reading as the primary skill, followed by listening, speaking, and writing, with the goal of equipping students to engage with various text types including narrative, descriptive, procedural, expository, and report texts (Pouw & Mulyanti, 2023). Through reading instruction, students develop the ability to understand main ideas, specific details, and authorial intent, while also making inferences about implicit information.

Despite this curricular emphasis, many students in Indonesia struggle with reading comprehension, particularly in descriptive texts. Research at SMA Negeri 6 Padangsidimpuan revealed that tenth-grade students consistently scored below the minimum passing score (KKM) of 75 in reading comprehension assessments. These challenges suggest deficiencies in instructional strategies and educational support systems that need to be addressed to improve students' reading outcomes. Similar challenges have been documented at other institutions in the region, such as at SMK Swasta Pancadharma Padangsidimpuan, where Pulungan et al. found that students primarily struggle with vocabulary deficiencies that hinder their ability to comprehend main ideas and supporting details in texts (Pulungan et al., 2023).

The Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) has emerged as a promising intervention to enhance reading comprehension skills. This strategy encourages students to predict, verify, and reflect on their predictions about the text, connecting existing knowledge with new information through cues such as pictures, illustrations, subtitles, and narrative flow (Ramadhani & Harputra, 2016). Research by (Safitri et al., 2022) has highlighted DRTA as an effective teaching method that significantly improves students' comprehension skills, while (Apriliana, 2022) reported a substantial improvement in reading comprehension with an N-gain score of 64.02% following DRTA implementation. This approach aligns with recent findings that suggest active reading strategies significantly impact comprehension outcomes. (Huang et al., 2022) found that students who engage in prediction and verification activities show greater improvement in reading comprehension compared to those using traditional methods. Similarly, (Hidayat et al., 2020) demonstrated that DRTA implementation in Indonesian high schools led to increased student engagement and better text analysis skills. The importance of innovative teaching methods in enhancing reading comprehension is further supported by local research. (Harahap et al., 2023) investigated the use of short stories to improve reading comprehension among Class VIII students at the Karya Sejahtera Padangsidimpuan Madrasah Tsanawiyah Education Foundation. Their findings revealed a significant increase in students' reading comprehension skills after implementing short stories, with average scores improving from 53 in the pre-test to 90.87 in the final post-test, representing a 70.3% improvement. This underscores the effectiveness of engaging teaching materials in enhancing reading comprehension.

Additionally, (Pratiwi et al., 2024) identified specific challenges faced by eighth-grade students at MTs Swasta Darul Akhiroh in comprehending descriptive English texts. Their study highlighted vocabulary deficiencies, text length, and lack of student interest as major barriers to effective reading comprehension. These findings suggest that any intervention aimed at improving reading comprehension should address not only cognitive aspects but also motivational factors that influence student engagement with texts.

Further supporting the connection between student engagement and reading outcomes, (Romaito et al., 2024) explored the relationship between reading interest and critical reading skills among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Padangsidimpuan.

Their research revealed a significant correlation between reading interest and critical reading abilities, indicating that students with higher reading interest tend to demonstrate better critical reading skills. This suggests that fostering student interest should be a key component of any reading comprehension intervention.

The current study aims to investigate the effects of implementing DRTA to enhance the reading comprehension of descriptive texts among tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 6 Padangsidimpuan. By employing this interactive strategy, we seek to transform reading lessons into more dynamic, engaging, and productive learning experiences that address existing comprehension challenges. Through a systematic, classroom-based intervention, this research will contribute to understanding how DRTA can foster critical thinking, prior knowledge activation, and improved overall reading performance in the Indonesian EFL context.

B. LITERATUR REVIEW

1. The Nature of Reading Comprehension

Reading is a complex cognitive process that goes beyond merely decoding written symbols. Scholars define reading as an interpretative and interactive act where readers actively engage with text to construct meaning (Cholsakorn, 2020; Wallace, 2014). Reading comprehension specifically involves extracting and constructing meaning from written text through an integrative process that combines textual information with the reader's prior knowledge (McCarthy & McNamara, 2021). (De-la-Peña & Luque-Rojas, 2021) identify three levels of reading comprehension: literal comprehension (understanding explicit content), inferential comprehension (drawing conclusions and making predictions), and critical comprehension (analyzing and evaluating text). Effective comprehension requires readers to employ various cognitive strategies including decoding, contextual analysis, and utilizing vocabulary knowledge (Rakhshanfadaee, 2022).

2. Reading Comprehension Challenges in Indonesian EFL Contexts

Indonesian students face significant challenges in developing English reading comprehension skills. Recent studies by (Pulungan et al., 2023) and (Pratiwi et al., 2024) identify vocabulary deficiencies, text length, and low engagement as primary obstacles hindering comprehension. These findings align with (Septiani, 2024) research showing that Indonesian secondary school students particularly struggle

with inferring meanings, identifying implied information, and understanding complex sentence structures. Motivational factors significantly impact reading comprehension outcomes. (Romaito et al., 2024) demonstrated a strong correlation between reading interest and critical reading abilities, while (Nugroho et al., 2012) found that highly motivated students show better comprehension regardless of text difficulty.

3. Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA)

The Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA), developed by Stauffer in 1969, is an instructional strategy designed to enhance reading comprehension through active engagement and critical thinking (As'ad & Garwan, 2022). Its core components include preparation, silent reading, vocabulary development, and culminating activities (Awwalin, 2020).

The predictive cycle forms the heart of DRTA, where students make predictions based on text titles or visual cues, verify these predictions while reading, and reflect on their accuracy afterward (Rahim, 2019). This constant cycle actively engages students in the meaning-making process.

Multiple studies confirm DRTA's effectiveness in improving reading comprehension. (Safitri et al., 2022) attribute its success to how it fosters interactive learning environments, while Huang and Yang's (2022) meta-analysis found that DRTA particularly benefits intermediate-level learners when implemented over extended periods.

4. Innovative Approaches to Enhance Reading Comprehension

Beyond DRTA, researchers have explored various innovative approaches to enhance reading comprehension. (Harahap et al., 2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of short stories in improving comprehension skills among Indonesian students. Technology integration through digital storytelling (Zulkarnain et al., 2023) and collaborative reading strategies (Sari & Juandi, 2023) have also shown promising results.

Effective reading instruction in Indonesian EFL contexts requires moving beyond traditional teacher-centered methods toward more student-centered, interactive approaches that address both cognitive and affective dimensions of reading comprehension(Capin et al., 2021).

5. Reading Comprehension Assessment

Comprehensive assessment of reading comprehension should evaluate understanding of main ideas, supporting details, inferences, vocabulary in context, and text structure (Hikmah et al., 2021). While traditional methods include multiple-choice questions and summarization tasks, recent developments emphasize authentic assessment that reflects real-world reading tasks (Francois & Hood, 2021).

Digital technologies have expanded assessment possibilities, providing immediate feedback and enabling more targeted instructional interventions (Maier & Klotz, 2022). Effective assessment should align with instructional objectives and inform subsequent teaching decisions as part of the continuous teaching-learning cycle (Oli, 2024).

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs Classroom Action Research (CAR) as its primary methodology, characterized by a cyclical, participative, qualitative, and reflective approach that combines research activities with action implementation (Arikunto, 2014). Initially introduced by Kurt Lewin in 1946, CAR has evolved as an effective methodology for improving teaching and learning practices (Kemmis, 2021). The research follows a participatory model where the researcher remains actively involved throughout the entire process, enabling firsthand insights into classroom dynamics. The design follows (Arikunto, 2014)'s model, consisting of four key stages in each research cycle: planning, action, observation, and reflection.

This research is conducted at SMA Negeri 6 Padangsidimpuan, located at Jalan Sutan Soripada Mulia No. 25 A, Padangsidimpuan City, over approximately one month. The population comprises all tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 6 Padangsidimpuan, totaling 192 students across six classes. Class X-1, consisting of 32 students, serves as the research sample, selected through purposive sampling based on representative characteristics, accessibility, and implementation feasibility. The research is structured in multiple cycles, with each cycle consisting of four stages. In the planning stage, the researcher obtains necessary permissions, conducts preliminary observations, identifies issues affecting reading comprehension, develops DRTA-focused lesson plans, and prepares evaluation instruments. During the action stage, the researcher implements

the planned intervention by applying the DRTA model in teaching descriptive texts, following the sequence of prediction, reading, and verification. Observation occurs simultaneously with action, documenting student participation, engagement, and responses to the DRTA strategy. The reflection phase involves analyzing collected data, evaluating intervention success, identifying implementation strengths and weaknesses, and determining whether to proceed to another cycle. The study employs multiple instruments including students' worksheets to assess comprehension of descriptive texts using the DRTA approach; reflection sheets to evaluate intervention effectiveness after each cycle; and pre-test and post-test assessments to measure comprehension before and after the intervention. Tests follow a structured format with multiple-choice questions (worth 90 points) and essay questions (worth 10 points), totaling 100 possible points. Data analysis combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative analysis calculates individual student scores, mean scores for the class, and the percentage of students reaching the Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM) of 75. Success criteria categorize scores as: 89-100 (Very Good), 79-89 (Good), 70-79 (Sufficient), and <70 (Need guidance). Qualitative analysis examines observational data regarding student activities, teacher performance, engagement patterns, and intervention effectiveness. The research will be considered successful if at least 80% of all students reach the minimum competency level (KKM) of 75 for reading comprehension in descriptive texts, indicating significant improvement resulting directly from the DRTA intervention.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Result of Research

   a. Pre-Cycle Results

   The initial assessment conducted on April 22, 2024, established a baseline understanding of students' reading comprehension abilities before implementing the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) strategy. The pre-cycle observation revealed significant challenges in reading comprehension among tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 6 Padangsidimpuan. Students exhibited signs of low confidence when reading aloud, made unnecessary movements, and demonstrated poor comprehension skills. The quantitative data from the pre-cycle assessment showed an average score of 56.56, substantially below the

Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM) of 75. Only 5 students (15.625%) achieved scores above the KKM, while 27 students (84.375%) scored below this threshold. The frequency distribution revealed that 25 students (78.125%) fell into the "Need guidance" category, 3 students (9.375%) were in the "Sufficient" category, 3 students (9.375%) were in the "Good" category, and only 1 student (3.125%) reached the "Very Good" category. These results clearly indicated the need for an intervention to improve students' reading comprehension skills.

b. Cycle I Implementation and Results

The first cycle of DRTA implementation took place on May 14, 2024, following careful planning that included preparing lesson plans, teaching materials, and assessment instruments. The implementation focused on descriptive text about a local tourist attraction, specifically Aek Sijorni Waterfall in South Tapanuli.

The DRTA strategy was implemented through five key steps: (1) making predictions based on the title, (2) making predictions from picture cues, (3) reading the text, (4) assessing prediction accuracy, and (5) repeating the procedure. Students were encouraged to predict content based on the title "Panorama 'Heavenly', Waterfall Tourism in South Tapanuli" and visual cues showing the waterfall. They then read the text to verify their predictions, followed by a reflection discussion on prediction accuracy. Post-implementation assessment in Cycle I showed improvement in reading comprehension scores. The class average increased to 71.91, with 17 students (53.125%) achieving scores above the KKM. The frequency distribution showed 10 students (31.25%) still in the "Need guidance" category, 17 students (53.125%) in the "Sufficient" category, 4 students (12.5%) in the "Good" category, and 1 student (3.125%) in the "Very Good" category. Despite this improvement, the reflection stage identified several weaknesses in the implementation, including classroom management issues, time allocation problems, and insufficient guidance for students with reading difficulties. These observations informed modifications for the second cycle.

c. Cycle II Implementation and Results

Based on the reflection from Cycle I, improvements were made for Cycle II, conducted on May 21, 2024. These included better class management, more

thorough guidance for students with reading difficulties, proper time allocation, and enhanced strategies to engage students actively in the learning process.

The DRTA implementation in Cycle II used a descriptive text titled "The Ladder to Happiness," accompanied by a visual representation of a staircase leading to the sky. The same DRTA sequence was followed, with students making predictions based on the title and image, reading the text to verify their predictions, and reflecting on the accuracy of their initial assumptions.

The results from Cycle II demonstrated significant improvement in students' reading comprehension. The class average increased to 83.34, with 29 students (90.625%) achieving scores above the KKM. The frequency distribution showed only 3 students (9.375%) remaining in the "Need guidance" category, 7 students (21.875%) in the "Sufficient" category, 9 students (28.125%) in the "Good" category, and 13 students (40.625%) in the "Very Good" category.

The reflection from Cycle II indicated that students had significantly improved in reading comprehension aspects, including understanding main ideas, supporting details, and making inferences. Students demonstrated increased engagement with the text and exhibited greater confidence in reading. The classroom atmosphere was more conducive to learning, with students actively participating in the prediction, reading, and verification stages of the DRTA process.

d. Comparative Analysis of Results

The comparative analysis of results across all phases of the research revealed a consistent pattern of improvement in students' reading comprehension skills following the implementation of the DRTA strategy. The mean score increased from 56.56 in the pre-cycle to 71.91 in Cycle I and further to 83.34 in Cycle II. Similarly, the percentage of students achieving the KKM rose from 15.625% in the pre-cycle to 53.125% in Cycle I and 90.625% in Cycle II.

This progression represents a 37.5% increase in student achievement between the pre-cycle and Cycle I, and another 37.5% increase between Cycle I and Cycle II. The overall improvement from pre-cycle to Cycle II was 75%, demonstrating the substantial impact of the DRTA strategy on students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts.

The data also showed significant changes in the distribution of students across performance categories. The number of students in the "Need guidance"

category decreased from 25 (78.125%) in the pre-cycle to 3 (9.375%) in Cycle II. Conversely, the number of students in the "Very Good" category increased from 1 (3.125%) in the pre-cycle to 13 (40.625%) in Cycle II.

The research findings met the success criteria established at the outset of the study, which required at least 80% of students to achieve the KKM. With 90.625% of students reaching this threshold by the end of Cycle II, the DRTA strategy proved effective in enhancing reading comprehension skills among tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 6 Padangsidimpuan.

Based on these results, the researcher concluded that the implementation of the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) strategy significantly improved students' reading comprehension in descriptive texts, and no further cycles were deemed necessary.

2. Discussion

The findings of this research demonstrate the significant impact of the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) strategy on enhancing reading comprehension skills in descriptive texts among tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 6 Padangsidimpuan. The substantial improvement in students' reading comprehension scores—from a pre-cycle average of 56.56 to 83.34 in Cycle II—aligns with previous research highlighting DRTA's effectiveness (Safitri et al., 2022). The 75% overall improvement observed in this study surpasses the 64.02% improvement reported by (Apriliana, 2022), suggesting that the implementation approach used in this research may have optimized DRTA's potential benefits.

The progressive improvement across cycles demonstrates that DRTA's effectiveness increases with consistent application and refinement, supporting (Nurmadina & Yuliah, 2021) finding that DRTA's impact is more pronounced when implemented over extended periods. The research findings indicate that DRTA enhanced various dimensions of reading comprehension, including students' ability to identify main ideas, understand supporting details, make inferences, and engage critically with descriptive texts.

The implementation of DRTA effectively addressed two primary challenges identified in previous research on Indonesian EFL learners: vocabulary deficiencies and low engagement (Pratiwi et al., 2024; Pulungan et al., 2023). The DRTA strategy

helped mitigate vocabulary challenges by providing contextual support through prediction activities and visual cues, while the active nature of making predictions, verifying them through reading, and reflecting on accuracy created an interactive learning environment that sustained student interest.

The modifications made between Cycle I and Cycle II—including improved classroom management, better time allocation, and enhanced guidance for struggling readers—contributed significantly to the increased effectiveness in the second cycle. This indicates that successful DRTA implementation requires not only following the basic procedural steps but also adapting them to specific classroom contexts and student needs.

This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of reading comprehension by demonstrating how DRTA bridges bottom-up and top-down processing models, supporting the interactive model of reading described by Aebersold and Field (Cholsakorn, 2020). The findings also highlight the role of metacognition in reading comprehension, as DRTA explicitly encourages students to monitor their understanding by comparing their predictions with textual information.

Despite limitations including the single-class sample and relatively short timeframe, this research underscores DRTA's potential as an effective pedagogical approach for EFL contexts. By actively engaging students in prediction, verification, and reflection activities, DRTA transforms reading from a passive to an interactive process, fostering deeper comprehension and critical thinking skills. This emphasizes the importance of moving beyond traditional teacher-centered methods toward more interactive approaches that position students as active participants in the meaning-making process.

E. CONCLUSION

This research investigated the impact of implementing the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) strategy on reading comprehension of descriptive texts among tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 6 Padangsidimpuan. The findings demonstrate significant improvement in students' reading comprehension skills, with class average scores increasing from 56.56 in the pre-cycle to 71.91 in Cycle I and 83.34 in Cycle II. The percentage of students achieving the Minimum Competency Criteria rose from

15.625% to 90.625% across the intervention period, representing a 75% overall improvement.

The prediction-verification cycle proved particularly effective in engaging students actively with texts. By making predictions based on titles and visual cues before reading, students activated prior knowledge and established purpose for reading. The verification process fostered critical thinking and deeper textual engagement, transforming reading from passive to interactive.

Systematic refinement between cycles significantly enhanced effectiveness. Adjustments in classroom management, time allocation, student guidance, and collaborative discussion opportunities contributed substantially to improved outcomes in Cycle II, highlighting the importance of adaptive implementation based on observation and reflection.

DRTA effectively addressed specific challenges faced by Indonesian EFL learners, including vocabulary deficiencies and low engagement. The strategy provided contextual support through prediction activities and visual cues, while its interactive nature sustained student interest. Students demonstrated improved ability across multiple dimensions of reading comprehension, including identifying main ideas, understanding supporting details, making inferences, and engaging critically with texts.

This research contributes to evidence supporting student-centered, interactive approaches to reading instruction in EFL contexts. By positioning students as active participants in the meaning-making process, DRTA fosters deeper comprehension and critical thinking. The strategy's success suggests its potential applicability in similar educational settings facing reading comprehension challenges, highlighting the value of interactive teaching strategies in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

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