Enhancing Students' Reading Comprehension of Recount Texts through Comic Strips: A Classroom Action Research at SMP Negeri 4 Padangsidimpuan

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ABSTRACT

This classroom action research aims to investigate the effectiveness of comic strips in enhancing students' reading comprehension of recount texts. The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Padangsidimpuan during the 2023–2024 academic year, involving 60 eighth-grade students. The research design followed two cycles of Classroom Action Research (CAR), each consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages. Data were collected through a pre-test, post-test 1, and post-test 2, supported by classroom observation. The results revealed a significant improvement in students' reading performance. The mean score increased from 53.67 in the pre-test to 68.08 in post-test 1, and finally to 81.92 in post-test 2. The percentage of students who passed the minimum competency standard (KKM) rose from 3.33% to 86.67%. These findings demonstrate that comic strips are an effective instructional medium that can foster student motivation, support vocabulary development, and improve comprehension of text structures in recount writing. This study concludes that the use of comic strips can significantly enhance reading comprehension skills and should be considered as an engaging and pedagogically valuable tool in English language classrooms.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the fundamental language skills essential in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). It allows learners to acquire new information, expand vocabulary, and develop language fluency, while also serving as a foundation for writing and speaking skills (Mikulecky & Jeffries, 1996). Effective reading, however, depends on comprehension. Without understanding the meaning of a text, reading becomes a purposeless activity (Woolley, 2011).

Despite its importance, many students struggle with reading comprehension, especially in English. At SMP Negeri 4 Padangsidimpuan, eighth-grade students were observed to have low motivation and underachievement in reading tasks. Most failed to meet the minimum passing grade (KKM) of 75, which was attributed to a lack of vocabulary knowledge, limited exposure to reading strategies, and disinterest in conventional reading materials.

These challenges are consistent with recent studies in the region. (Pulungan et al., 2023) conducted a study at SMK Swasta Pancadharma Padangsidimpuan and found that the majority of tenth-grade students faced significant comprehension difficulties due to vocabulary deficiencies. The study revealed that 71% of students could not identify supporting details, and many struggled with understanding antonyms, answering specific questions, and interpreting meaning from context. The researchers emphasized the need for varied instructional strategies and the use of engaging media to help students overcome these obstacles.

Similarly, (Harahap et al., 2023) investigated the use of short stories in enhancing the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at the Karya Sejahtera Padangsidimpuan Madrasah Tsanawiyah. The results showed a substantial improvement in students' scores—from an average of 53 in the pre-test to 90.87 in the second post-test, indicating a 70.3% increase. This study further supports the idea that innovative, narrative-based media such as short stories can significantly boost students' motivation and comprehension skills.

In line with these findings, the present study explores the use of comic strips as a visual and textual medium to improve students' reading comprehension of recount texts. Comics combine sequential visual storytelling with concise textual elements, making them both accessible and engaging (Manning, 1998). Prior research suggests that

comics can help learners understand complex ideas through imagery, support vocabulary development, and promote active engagement in reading (Azizah & Hamid, 2022; Dong, 2014; Merc & Kampusu, 2013) argued that comics serve as authentic materials, providing learners with real-world context and meaningful input.

This classroom action research aims to examine whether the use of comic strips can effectively enhance students' reading comprehension, specifically in understanding recount texts. The study seeks to address the following question: *Can comic strips significantly improve the reading comprehension of recount texts among eighth-grade students?*

B. LITERATUR REVIEW

1. Reading Comprehension in EFL Contexts

Reading comprehension is a crucial skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. It refers to the ability to understand, interpret, and critically engage with written texts. According to (Woolley, 2011), reading comprehension involves making meaning from text by integrating background knowledge with textual information. In EFL settings, students often face challenges in reading due to limited vocabulary, unfamiliar grammatical structures, and lack of motivation. (Mikulecky & Jeffries, 1996) suggest that reading enhances not only linguistic knowledge but also general cognitive abilities such as critical thinking and inference-making. However, comprehension does not occur automatically; it requires explicit strategy instruction and adequate reading materials that align with students' interests and language proficiency. Recent findings by (Pulungan et al., 2023) confirm that EFL learners in vocational high schools struggle significantly with vocabulary, which negatively impacts their ability to identify main ideas and supporting details. The study shows that 71% of students could not locate supporting ideas in a text, emphasizing the need for instructional media that can scaffold reading processes.

2. Teaching Recount Texts in Junior High School

Recount text is a type of narrative that retells past experiences in chronological order. (Anderson, 2003) classifies recounts into personal, factual, and imaginative types, each with distinct characteristics and communicative purposes. In the Indonesian curriculum, understanding recount texts is a basic competency for junior high school students, as it develops their ability to process past events and organize

thoughts in sequence. To comprehend recount texts effectively, students must understand their structure—typically including orientation, series of events, and re-orientation—and be familiar with linguistic features such as past tense verbs, time connectives, and descriptive language (Wijayanti, 2011). Yet, many students find these texts difficult, particularly when presented in long, purely verbal forms without visual aids.

3. Comic Strips as a Reading Medium

Comics are a hybrid medium that integrates images and text to communicate meaning. (Manning, 1998) defines comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and produce an aesthetic response in the reader." In language learning, comic strips can be powerful tools for improving reading comprehension. They provide visual context that supports word recognition and meaning-making, especially for learners with low literacy or vocabulary levels. (Dong, 2014) and (Csabay, 2006) advocate for the use of comic strips in EFL classrooms, highlighting their potential to foster motivation and enhance comprehension through visual narratives. These materials offer authentic language input and help students connect ideas more easily through storytelling frameworks.

Moreover, a study by (Azizah & Hamid, 2022) demonstrated that the use of comic strips significantly improved students' vocabulary retention and reading comprehension. This is particularly relevant in Indonesian junior high schools, where students often disengage from lengthy texts but respond positively to visual and contextualized reading materials.

4. Previous Studies on Reading Strategies

Several studies have explored alternative reading strategies to enhance comprehension in EFL contexts. (Harahap et al., 2023) found that short story implementation led to a 70.3% increase in students' reading comprehension scores over two post-tests. This underscores the importance of selecting engaging and developmentally appropriate texts to stimulate student interest and improve learning outcomes. Likewise, comic-based instruction, as explored in the current study, builds on this approach by combining narrative structure, visual literacy, and language input

in a single medium. As such, it aligns with constructivist learning principles, encouraging students to actively construct meaning from multimodal texts.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, which aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning through systematic cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. CAR allows teachers and researchers to collaboratively identify problems in the classroom, test instructional interventions, and evaluate their effectiveness in real-time contexts (Arikunto, 2017; Creswell, 2020). The focus of this study was to determine whether the use of comic strips could improve the reading comprehension of recount texts among eighth-grade students. The research was carried out in two cycles, with each cycle consisting of three stages: (1) planning, (2) implementing action, (3) observing classroom interactions and outcomes, and (4) reflecting on the results.

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Padangsidimpuan, located in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The study took place in March 2024. The population comprised all eighth-grade students of the school during the 2023–2024 academic year, totaling 264 students. Due to the large size of the population, the study employed random sampling, selecting 60 students as the research sample. These students were considered representative of the population, as they had similar backgrounds, language proficiency levels, and learning conditions. The random sampling technique followed (Arikunto, 2017) recommendation for obtaining valid and generalizable findings in educational research.

The primary instrument for data collection in this study was a reading comprehension test designed in the form of multiple-choice questions. These items were specifically developed to assess students' understanding of recount texts, which are a core component of the junior high school English curriculum. Each test contained 20 questions, with a scoring system that awarded five points for each correct answer and zero for incorrect responses. To evaluate students' progress, two sets of tests were administered: a pre-test and post-tests. The pre-test was conducted prior to the implementation of comic strip media in order to determine the students' baseline reading comprehension levels. The post-tests were administered at the end of each cycle—Post-test 1 after the first cycle and Post-test 2 after the second cycle—to

measure improvements in students' comprehension following the use of comic strips in reading instruction. In addition to the written tests, classroom observations and records of student engagement during the learning process were used as supplementary sources of data to provide qualitative insights and strengthen the validity of the findings.

This study followed the four systematic phases of Classroom Action Research (CAR): planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. In the planning phase, the researcher collaborated with the classroom teacher to develop a lesson plan, select appropriate comic strip materials relevant to recount texts, and prepare the necessary assessment tools. The acting phase involved the actual implementation of comic strip-based reading activities during English lessons, wherein students engaged with visual narratives as part of the learning process. During the observation phase, the researcher monitored the students' behavior, participation, and performance throughout the intervention. Field notes and reflective journals were used to document how students responded to the materials and classroom activities. In the reflecting phase, the data from the tests and classroom observations were analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching strategy. Based on the results of the first cycle, adjustments were made to improve the instructional approach in the second cycle. This iterative process continued until the target success criteria were achieved, which was defined as at least 75% of students reaching the minimum passing grade of 75 in reading comprehension.

To analyze the test results, two main statistical procedures were used:

Mean Score (M):

$$M = \frac{\Sigma X}{N}$$

Where ΣX is the total score of all students and N is the number of students.

Classical Completeness Percentage (P):

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Where F is the number of students achieving scores above the KKM (minimum passing grade of 75). The percentage of improvement from pre-test to each post-test was also calculated to measure the effectiveness of comic strip media in enhancing reading comprehension. The research was considered successful if at least 75% of the students achieved the minimum mastery criterion (KKM) in the post-test of the final cycle.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Result of Research

This study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of using comic strips as a medium to improve students' reading comprehension of recount texts. The research involved 60 eighth-grade students from SMP Negeri 4 Padangsidimpuan during the 2023–2024 academic year and was implemented through two cycles of Classroom Action Research (CAR). Data were collected using three tests: a pre-test, post-test 1 (after Cycle I), and post-test 2 (after Cycle II).

Pre-Test Results

Prior to the intervention, a pre-test was administered to determine students' initial reading comprehension levels. The results revealed a generally low performance. The students' scores ranged from 30 to 75, with a mean score of 53.67, placing the class in the "incapable" category. Only 2 out of 60 students (3.33%) met the minimum completeness criteria (KKM) of 75. These findings indicate that the majority of students struggled to understand recount texts and highlighted the need for an alternative instructional strategy to enhance their comprehension skills.

Post-Test Cycle I Results

In response to the low pre-test outcomes, the first cycle of the intervention was carried out using comic strips as the core learning medium. After the implementation, post-test 1 was given to evaluate the immediate effect of the strategy. The results showed a noticeable improvement in students' performance, with scores ranging from 45 to 90. The mean score rose to 68.08, reflecting a 26.86% improvement from the pre-test. Moreover, 25 students (41.67%) managed to pass the KKM. Although this indicated a promising development, the class had not yet reached the success criterion of at least 75% of students achieving the KKM score. Therefore, a second cycle of intervention was deemed necessary.

Post-Test Cycle II Results

To further enhance student outcomes, instructional refinements were made and implemented in Cycle II. Post-test 2 was administered at the end of the second cycle. The results demonstrated a significant gain in students' reading comprehension abilities. The scores ranged from 65 to 90, with a mean score of 81.92. Notably, 52 students (86.67%) successfully achieved or exceeded the KKM, marking a 52.64%

improvement compared to the pre-test results. This surpassed the targeted success threshold and indicated that the learning objectives of the study had been met.

The overall findings from the three assessment stages demonstrate a consistent and substantial improvement in students' reading comprehension of recount texts. The integration of comic strips into reading instruction not only increased the average test scores but also raised the proportion of students who met the required competency standard. These results are summarized in the following table:

Table 1

Summary of Students' Reading Comprehension Test Results

Test	Mean Score	Students Passed KKM	Total Students	Percentage Passed (%)
Pre-Test	53.67	2	60	3.33%
Post-Test 1	68.08	25	60	41.67%
Post-Test 2	81.92	52	60	86.67%

The progression of student performance is further illustrated in the figures below. Figure 1 displays the increase in average scores from the pre-test to post-test 2, while Figure 2 shows the growth in the percentage of students achieving the KKM.

These results clearly support the conclusion that comic strips can serve as an effective medium in improving students' comprehension of recount texts. As the intervention achieved its stated objectives by the end of Cycle II, the research was concluded.

2. The Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the use of comic strips had a significant and positive impact on improving students' reading comprehension of recount texts. This improvement was evident through the progression of test scores from the pre-test to post-test 2, where the average score increased from 53.67 to 81.92, and the percentage of students achieving the minimum completeness criteria (KKM) rose from 3.33% to 86.67%. Such results demonstrate that comic strips can effectively serve as an instructional tool to address the challenges students face in reading comprehension, particularly in understanding narrative texts like recounts.

One of the primary reasons behind this improvement is that comic strips offer a combination of visual and textual information, which aids in contextualizing meaning

for learners. According to (Manning, 1998), comics are a form of visual language that enables readers to process information in a sequential and coherent way. This aligns with the cognitive theory of multimedia learning, which states that learners understand content more effectively when it is presented through both verbal and visual channels.

Furthermore, the use of comic strips likely helped overcome one of the most common barriers in reading comprehension: limited vocabulary. (Pulungan et al., 2023) emphasized that vocabulary deficiency is one of the most significant obstacles for Indonesian students when engaging with English texts. The visual context provided by comic strips supports students in inferring the meanings of unfamiliar words, thereby reducing their dependence on direct translation or dictionary use and allowing for more fluent reading. The positive outcomes of this study also align with the results of (Harahap et al., 2023), who found that incorporating short narrative texts such as short stories significantly enhanced the reading comprehension scores of eighth-grade students. Both short stories and comic strips share narrative structures and engaging content, which promote students' motivation and involvement in reading tasks. Comic strips, however, offer an additional advantage by presenting content in a more accessible and visually stimulating format.

Another key factor contributing to the success of this intervention is the increased student engagement during reading activities. When learning becomes enjoyable, students are more likely to participate actively and persist in comprehending the material. (Csabay, 2006) argues that comic strips are effective in language classes because they provide authentic, entertaining, and meaningful content, which leads to increased motivation and comprehension.

Moreover, the improvement seen in this study aligns with previous research by (Azizah & Hamid, 2022), who reported that comic strips significantly improved vocabulary retention and overall comprehension among young learners. In the present study, similar effects were observed as students demonstrated greater ability to identify main ideas, supporting details, and sequence of events—key components of recount texts. Finally, from a pedagogical perspective, this research supports the use of comic strips as an effective strategy for differentiated instruction, particularly for students who struggle with conventional reading materials. The

results of Cycle II confirm that this approach not only meets learning objectives but also fosters a more inclusive classroom environment where all students can succeed.

In conclusion, the discussion of this research confirms that the use of comic strips is an effective medium for enhancing students' reading comprehension of recount texts. The integration of visual elements, contextual vocabulary support, and engaging storytelling contributes to improved learning outcomes. These findings suggest that comic strips should be considered as a valuable addition to the instructional toolkit in EFL reading classrooms.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, it can be concluded that the integration of comic strips into reading instruction significantly improved the students' reading comprehension of recount texts. The implementation of comic strips as a teaching medium provided a meaningful, engaging, and visually supported learning experience that facilitated students' understanding of narrative structure, vocabulary, and key details in the text.

The improvement was quantitatively evident. The mean score increased from 53.67 in the pre-test to 81.92 in post-test 2, with the percentage of students achieving the minimum passing grade (KKM) rising from 3.33% to 86.67%. These results demonstrate that the use of comic strips was not only effective but also transformative in helping students move from the "incapable" to the "capable" category in reading comprehension.

The positive outcomes of the research support previous literature that emphasizes the benefits of multimodal texts in language learning. Comic strips, through their combination of visuals and text, helped students overcome common reading barriers such as lack of motivation and limited vocabulary. Furthermore, this method fostered greater engagement and made the reading process more accessible, particularly for learners who typically struggle with traditional reading materials.

In conclusion, comic strips represent an effective and pedagogically sound approach for enhancing reading comprehension, especially within EFL contexts. Their use is highly recommended for English teachers seeking innovative ways to develop students' literacy skills, and future studies may further explore their application across different genres and educational levels.

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